

will have the freedom to terrorize the rest of Iraq and beyond. The Director of National Intelligence stated that he is "increasingly concerned that as we inflict significant damage on al-Qa'ida in Iraq, it may shift resources to mounting more attacks outside of Iraq Although the ongoing conflict in Iraq will likely absorb most of AQI's resources [over] the next year, AQI has leveraged its broad external networks—including some reaching into Europe—in support of external operations." Forcing our troops out of Iraq would result in a resurgent AQI which could mount attacks from Iraq against Americans and our allies.

Security is not the only aspect improving in Iraq. On the political front, the Council of Representatives is taking steps to institute necessary legislation to help reconcile Iraq.

Earlier this month, the Council of Representatives passed a deBaathification law which will help reintegrate former regime officials into society. Two weeks ago, the Council of Representatives passed three key pieces of legislation: an amnesty law, a provincial powers law, and the 2008 fiscal budget. For the first time, Iraq's main political parties compromised in order to support passage of these bills. The provincial powers law requires the council to pass an election law within 90 days and for provincial elections to occur no later than October 1, 2008. These are encouraging steps. In spite of the fact that the provincial powers law was vetoed yesterday, it is encouraging, and I am very hopeful we are going to see the differences reconciled in short order and that law become permanent.

By limiting our military actions to specific areas, this bill would ensure that every one of these successes and improvements in security is reversed. In the midst of progress in Iraq, which no one denies, and with a strategy that is working, it simply does not make sense to tie the hands of the commanders on the ground and force them to implement a strategy which will lead to failure—a strategy that in the best judgment of our military leaders, our intelligence agencies, and from the perspective of countless outside observers have stated will lead to the failure of our mission and the rapid deterioration of conditions in Iraq and for the Iraqi people.

Hopefully, it is evident to people who are watching this debate and have examined the Feingold bill that the strategy which inspires the provisions and limitations in this bill is not a military strategy; it is a political strategy. The tactics being used by those who would enact conditions and limitations on our involvement in Iraq, such as those contained in this bill, are not based on strategic thought or analysis. Rather, they appeal to a political base that has always opposed the war, refuses to acknowledge the progress we are making, and wants to see our mission fail.

Political strategies for fighting wars such as the rhetoric some are now exploring all have one thing in common: They all result in failure. They are shortsighted, politically motivated, do not serve any national security objective and, most importantly, are a disservice to the men and women who have been called into action and are on the ground in Iraq.

We are making progress in Iraq. The strategy our President and our military commanders have implemented is working. We are receiving positive updates from our leaders in the field. Our leaders are adjusting their strategy in accordance with those developments on the ground as well as the realities back home. They are doing this wisely, not hastily or in response to opinion polls, but according to good judgment and a realistic assessment of what will work, what will not work, and what is appropriate at this point in time.

The Feingold bill will stop our leaders' ability to do this. It will keep them from doing the jobs we sent them to do; and that is to lead, to decide, to make judgments, and to report back to us on their effectiveness. Most importantly, it will keep them from completing the job we have sent them to perform. This is unacceptable. For these reasons, I urge my colleagues to vote against this bill.

Mr. President, I yield back.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BUNNING. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. BUNNING. Mr. President, I request that the time I use in morning business not be counted against any of the Democratic time that has been set aside.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Kentucky is recognized.

IRAQ TROOP WITHDRAWAL

Mr. BUNNING. Mr. President, I rise today to speak in opposition to pulling our troops out of Iraq based on political timetables conceived in the Senate.

I have voted against similar measures in the past. I intend to vote against them again this week. These bills do nothing more than tie the hands of our commanders on the ground while pandering to special interests here in the United States—antiwar groups.

These are the same commanders who are risking their lives daily that our

mission in Iraq can continue to succeed. And our mission is succeeding. General Petraeus is succeeding. Violence in Iraq is at the lowest since the insurgency began. Suicide bombings are down 70 percent. IED attacks have been cut in half.

The surge is working. Since it began less than a year ago, we have succeeded in putting al-Qaida on the run, while rooting out the terrorists neighborhood by neighborhood. In return, Iraqis have partnered with U.S. troops, forming their own security forces, and stabilizing their own neighborhoods. These efforts have served to unite torn communities, such as Anbar Province, and pave the way for political reconciliation.

The other side has said for months the surge has failed because it has not created an environment for political progress in Iraq. Well, they are wrong. The correlation between the surge and security is obvious. In the past few weeks, as we continue to see increased stability throughout Iraq, the Iraqi Government has made great political strides.

On February 13, the Iraqi Council of Representatives passed three key pieces of legislation: An amnesty law, the 2008 budget, and a provincial powers law. These political milestones are made possible by Sunnis, Shiites, and Kurds reaching out to each other and working to find solutions that represent all Iraqis.

This is General Petraeus's counterinsurgency at work. It worked when he was commander of the 101st Airborne Division in Mosul, and now it is working all across Iraq.

So I ask my colleagues across the aisle: Why, when you see our mission in Iraq is succeeding, and the Iraqi people are making real political progress, do you want to pull the rug out from underneath our commanders and our troops?

Last July, the Senate overwhelmingly supported, by a vote of 94 to 3, a sense-of-the-Senate amendment stating that it is in our national security interests that Iraq not become a failed state and a safe haven for terrorists.

Well, wake up. Cutting and running from Iraq will only benefit the terrorists, while jeopardizing our national security and that of the Iraqi people.

Make no mistake, Iraq is the central battleground in our fight in the global war on terror. This is not just my opinion. Osama bin Laden has called Iraq the "central front" in his war against America. He knows that the premature withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq will strengthen his terrorist organization, enabling him to set up training camps in that country.

Although it has been over 6 years since we have experienced a terrorist attack on U.S. soil, we must never forget that there are those out there who wish to do us harm on a daily basis. And those who wish to do us harm will benefit if we pull out of Iraq and leave a failed state behind.

Al-Qaida and its allies flourish and multiply in the chaos of failed States with no rule of law or respect for human rights. Instead of debating a cut-and-run strategy in Iraq that has already failed on the floor of this Senate four times, we should be focusing on how to provide the defenders of our freedom—our commanders and our troops—with the necessary tools to complete their mission.

Last week, I had the opportunity to meet with the new commanding general of the 101st Airborne at Fort Campbell, KY. Located on the southern border between Kentucky and Tennessee, the Fort Campbell community has felt the effects of deployments and casualties.

Right around 200 soldiers from Fort Campbell have given their lives for their country. Thousands of good men and women have spent tours of 15 months away from their families—some four, some three, others two, and some one: tours of 15 or 12 months from the 101st Airborne in Iraq.

Speaking with the commanding general only reinforced my belief that we have some of the finest patriots serving in our Nation's military. The brave men and women who answer the call to defend our Nation, and the families and communities who support them, are our most valuable national asset. I do not want to see their unbelievable efforts in Iraq fail. We as a nation have invested too much to hand a big victory to al-Qaida in Iraq.

This political show needs to end.

In April, General Petraeus will report back to Congress on the state of our mission in Iraq. As Senators who voted in support of his confirmation, we owe him this opportunity to present his report to us, instead of cutting him off at the knees right before his report. We should show him the respect of listening to his report. We owe an honorable man, who has spent—I want you to remember this—who has spent most of the last 5 years away from his family in Iraq to see that freedom in America is preserved.

I urge my colleagues to join me in giving General Petraeus this opportunity and opposing these bills.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. NELSON of Nebraska). The Senator from Maryland is recognized.

IRAQ WAR

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, first of all, I welcome this opportunity to talk about the current status of the involvement of the United States in Iraq. I am glad we are having this discussion. I start by thanking the troops for their incredible service to our country and the incredible work they are doing, and I think this Congress, by words and deeds, has shown its support for our troops. The budget we provided last year provides the resources to take care of our veterans and the funds to take care of our active military. That is what we should be doing.

But we have now been in Iraq for many years. Several years ago I was in Iraq. I had a chance to visit our troops and take a look at what was happening on the ground. I saw then that we didn't have the right equipment there; that the administration had sent our troops without having the right support. I was proud of the action the Congress took in providing the military support and the type of equipment our troops needed.

But the discussion of what is best for our troops is whether we have the right mission in Iraq. This campaign is now entering its sixth year. We have been in Iraq longer than we were in World War II. We have now spent a half trillion dollars directly on our war in Iraq. Almost 4,000 Americans have been killed, almost 30,000 have been wounded, 67 Marylanders have given their lives, and over 800 have been injured. Many of these injuries are life changing.

I have had a chance to visit Andrews Air Force Base as our wounded soldiers come home, and I have been able to see firsthand the type of injuries they sustained. They will have to deal with them for the rest of their lives.

When we look at the strength of al-Qaida, our experts tell us they are stronger today than they have ever been. So we haven't accomplished our mission as far as dealing with the threat against the United States.

Let's talk about the facts. The inescapable conclusion is that President Bush was wrong in sending our troops to Iraq in the first place. I am proud I voted against that authorization when I was in the other body. Our troops are involved in trying to referee a civil war. That is their primary focus. Yes, we are fighting terrorists, and we need to continue to do that, but the primary need for American troops is to deal with the civil unrest that is currently taking place in Iraq.

The costs, as I explained before, in lives has been our deepest loss, but also the dollars—a half trillion dollars. Think about what we could have done with that money. I think about schools in Baltimore that should be replaced. We could have replaced every school with the money that has been spent so our children could get a proper education. We could have dealt with the energy crisis in this country and built the transit systems we need and become energy independent so we are not dependent on foreign oil in the Middle East. We could have done something about the health care system in this country.

A year ago, Diamante Driver died in Prince George's County, MD, because he couldn't get dental care. We are suffering an economic downturn right now because we have large debt, in part, and that debt is accumulating because we are not only spending a half trillion dollars, we are not paying for it. We are borrowing the money. It is making it even more dangerous for our economy.

So I know there has been a lot of debate on this floor about whether the President's surge policy has worked. I must tell my colleagues, I think our soldiers are performing, as I said earlier, in a great manner. When you put American troops in a country, they are going to do their job and they are going to provide the type of help to that country and to its communities that American troops are trained to do. But the problem is the mission is wrong. The surge has not worked in accomplishing the U.S. mission that is in the best interests of this country.

I remember when the President said: We are going to have the surge because we are going to provide stability in the country so the Iraqi Government can take control and we can bring our troops home. That was the mission. That is what we are trying to accomplish, but we haven't accomplished that. Let's look at the facts. Look at the facts.

Violence in Iraq continues today. The majority leader mentioned the headlines in today's paper. Violence continues. It is a dangerous country. Suicide bombers operate at will. The troop levels were supposed to be reduced. In January of 2007 we had 130,000 American troops in Iraq. Today we have in excess of 140,000. There is now a pause in reducing our troop levels. We haven't been able to reduce the troop levels. On governance, on the Iraqi Government representing the people of Iraq, they set their own benchmarks. We didn't set them. Of 18 benchmarks, only 3 have been accomplished. So, no, we haven't accomplished the mission the President established for why we needed our troops in Iraq.

But let's take a look at our military and foreign policy experts. They tell us our military today is spread too thin, that we aren't looking after the best interests of America's military interests. Talk to our people who run our National Guard and Reserve units.

I had a chance to meet with members of the Maryland National Guard. They have, again, answered the call. People of the Maryland National Guard have been deployed regularly into Iraq and Afghanistan. But I am told today we don't have the equipment in our National Guard to continue the proper training missions because the equipment was left in Iraq. We haven't replaced that. Also, recruitment is going to be more difficult, and we need to deal with the reintegration of the National Guard people who are coming back to Maryland in our community, and that is going to take a real effort. Now they have to be prepared for redeployment.

We have lost our focus, according to our experts on the war against terror. We should have taken care of Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. We haven't done that. Now Afghanistan looks as if it is moving in the wrong direction because we are not focusing on the threat, which is terrorism. Instead, we have our troops dealing with a civil